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SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/08/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: IS GAMBARI ON HIS WAY OUT?

REF: A. ABUJA 1248
[1](#)B. ABUJA 1226
[1](#)C. ABUJA 1043

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Press reports from July 7 editions of several major Nigerian newspapers claim that UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari will be asked to step down from his position as chairman of the Niger Delta Summit Steering Committee (reftels). With headlines saying that "Yar'Adua Drops Gambari" (Daily Trust) and "Gov't to Replace Gambari" (Guardian), Nigerian media assert that the opposition to Gambari's involvement in the summit has reached a critical mass, prompting President Yar'Adua to search for a replacement for him. Certain key stakeholders, such as prominent Niger Delta ethnic groups and core Delta State governors, have said they will boycott the summit if Gambari is involved. Opposition to Gambari's appointment is largely based on comments he made in 1995 while Nigerian envoy to the UN under the Abacha regime, saying that imprisoned, and later executed, Ogoni activist Ken Saro-wiwa was a "common criminal." Some Delta stakeholders have also objected to the idea of the chairmanship being given to a Northerner.

[1](#)2. (C) Raja Jandhyala (strictly protect), UN advisor on loan to the Vice-President's office, which has the GON lead on planning the summit, says that the news reports are the result of the Vice-President's office leaking a proposal to drop Gambari, and by doing so to try and force the President's hand into doing so before he has fully made up his mind. She says it is indeed a possibility that Gambari could be removed, but that for now they are trying to find a less up-front role for him. Either way, she says, the matter should be settled by the end of the week.

[1](#)3. (C) COMMENT: Whether press reports are true or not, we are hearing here that Gambari (who did not want the position initially) is not wrangling to keep the slot. In reftel A, he told the Ambassador that he prefers not to be involved. What the Administration does to save face on this -- either keeping Gambari or not -- remains to be seen. Yar'Adua is on the heels of coming back from the G-8 and will need to show more leadership and truly try to get discussions on the Niger Delta back on track. END COMMENT.
SANDERS